

coverages. By and large you will find frequently that the employee picks up 50 percent of the health insurance premium, an employer picks up 50 percent of the health insurance premium. That is a fairly common standard. In this case the state picks up, like I said, three-quarters or four-fifths of the cost, somewhere in that range. An employee picks up a fourth of the cost. That is just being too generous I think and it is also not recognizing the fact that we have been generous over these previous years. The money that we can save by keeping our health insurance costs down can be directed toward state employees salaries. I strongly support state employees salaries. I think they ought to have decent salaries. They are going to get a salary increase, hopefully an 8 percent or more salary increase this year. It is not like last year where we didn't give them a salary increase. With a salary increase this nominal increase that may occur in their health insurance coverage is not going to be a problem. If you support my different amendments you will find, in fact, the following result. The state's share of health insurance costs will remain at the current rate and the employees' share will reduce by 15 percent. I am asking you to follow a plan that would not only hold the line on state tax expenditures but we could reduce the current state employee contribution on health insurance by 15 percent so we're not even talking about shifting extra costs to the employee, we are reducing their costs as well as holding the line for the state. This is going to save money for everybody. Now it is going to cost a little more for those people that go to the hospital. Admittedly, they are not going to have first dollar coverage anymore but that is a thing of the past anyway. Across the state we have moved in that direction and it is time we recognize that in the state level. Other employer groups have come down here, you've heard from them. They are concerned, the Omaha Nationals and Conagras and InterNorth from Omaha and a lot of different companies are already moving in this direction. We are not blazing a trail although we ought to be. We could have done that last year but we are not now. But why should we be the last? Why should all the private industry go in this direction when we are not willing to take the step that we ought to. We are talking about providing leadership on health care in